

**Abstract 742**

**TITLE:** HIV Prevention in Drug Using Populations in Sub-Saharan African Region: An Agenda For Research and Intervention

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**ISSUE:** Although cannabis remains the most widely used substance in the Sub-Saharan African region (SSAR), heroin and cocaine use has been reported in many of the countries within the past 10-20 years. Despite the very high HIV seroprevalence in this region, very little research has been undertaken to determine the extent of injecting as a mode of use, and the link between injecting drug use and the epidemic. Another key research question in the context of SSAR is, what role is played by heavy use of non-injectable substances (alcohol, cannabis) in promoting risky health behaviors, and consequently facilitating an escalation of the HIV epidemic. Thus, in SSAR, the emphasis for now should be in gaining a thorough understanding of the problem and the associated factors, before proceeding to intervention. This paper outlines an agenda for research and practice that should address the gaps identified above.

**SETTING:** The focus of the proposed agenda is the SSAR comprising 46 countries. Although only 6-8 highly vulnerable countries, selected from the sub-regions, may be involved in the research/intervention experiment.

**PROJECT:** The agenda includes a rapid situation and response (RAR) package comprising qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as serological testing for HIV, HcpBV, and HcpCV. The study would include users of heroine and cocaine (injectors and non-injectors), cannabis and alcohol. The study samples will include current users in treatment, ex-users, youths, prisoners, commercial sex workers, street users and other highly vulnerable groups. Based on the findings of the rapid situation assessment (RSA), model intervention programmes will be set up in the study sites, and the outcome evaluated.

**RESULTS:** Not indicated yet, until studies are conducted.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Not relevant yet until specific interventions have been carried out.

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